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AUTHOR Dudney, Grazyna; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Adults differ from traditional-age college students in that they are self-directed, they have a rich bank of experiences upon which to draw in learning, they are ready to learn, and they value competence. Adults may learn equally well by performing different learning tasks. Second language learning activities and instructional materials can be adapted to meet these differing needs and characteristics, keeping in mind that they should bear a close and specific relationship to anticipated needs, provide frequent and clear attention to function as well as form, offer consistent communicative practice, exploit the "comprehension advantage," and systematically develop mental imagery to match verbal content. Exercises for functional language use can be developed easily by creating an information gap students must fill, e.g., asking students to come to a consensus about the most desirable breakfast. Typical textbook texts that require only comprehension or memorization can be enhanced by having students change the format, or summarize, analyze, or expand on the content. Seven tasks based on a single newspaper article and using two or more language skills are detailed. A checklist for teachers to use in evaluating the effectiveness of the classroom session is appended. (MSE)

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How to increase your teaching effectiveness immediately -- no joke!

Grazyna Dudney,
Maurice Funke,
Renata Kynast-Funke

ABSTRACT: The following article focuses on the implications of what we know about adult learners and learning. Notions from cognitive psychology, classifications of higher order thinking skills, and principles of materials development point toward effective ways of supplementing and adapting conventional classroom materials. Concrete examples taken from German, French, and Spanish lessons illustrate how to incorporate a variety of approaches into classroom teaching.

Adult learners are not only a distinct but a neglected species, according to Malcom Knowles, who coined the term "andragogy" in order to point out the distinction between the teaching of adults as opposed to the teaching of children. Adults, he suggests, differ in four significant ways:

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1) the concept of the learner,
2) the role of the learner's experience,
3) the readiness to learn, and
4) the orientation toward learning

1) Adult learners are self-directed. They generally choose what class to take, when, if and how to learn and whether to continue or discontinue their studies. During adolescence young people fight hard for independence. The struggle leaves emotionally laden materials in the brain which make adults sensitive and protective of their autonomy. Any change of status concerning independence can become a significant psychological problem for an adult. Consider, for example, the adult who becomes disabled in some form during adulthood. In such cases adults often face emotional turmoil when they become dependent on others. Children have usually not yet completely developed this type of autonomy. They accept being dependent on their parents, teachers and other adults and don't mind being

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given an assigned schedule and following a classroom format and curriculum which has been set by their teacher.

2) The role of the adult learner's experience differs from that of a child. Adults have a rich databank of experiences upon which we as learning facilitators can capitalize by mobilizing their schemata. If we teach vocabulary related to automobiles, we can assume that our students have looked under a hood before. When we have our students look at entertainment guides, we can assume that they take care of their own entertainment needs and know what it is they like to do in their spare time. If we talk about governments in other countries, we can assume that they have a sense of what democracy is and how it differs from fascism. Thus, the tasks we assign adults are quite different from the ones we would use while instructing children, who are traditionally but perhaps inappropriately considered a "tabula rasa", a blank sheet. In any case, a great deal of time in elementary schools is spent exposing children to concepts and ideas which they have not experienced, e.g., economy, crime or cuisine. The adult, on the other hand, can immediately relate to such concepts, each of them evoking a rich network of emotions and already learned information readily available for use in learning a foreign language.

3) The adult's readiness to learn arises out of needs, the intent to visit Europe, wanting to know more about their heritage, the desire to improve their job opportunities or simply the need to get required credits in a foreign language. Children, on the other hand, are generally prepared to follow the dictates of society and what is traditionally meant by "being educated." As teachers of adults we need to keep in mind that our adult learners' readiness to learn is the result of clear needs which must be account for, if we want to maintain student motivation and reduce attrition.

4) One of an adult's most important values is competence, whether that be as a parent, as a student or as an employee. Our adult sensitivity to any kind of insinuation that we might be incompetent testifies to the importance of this value. Some of the worst insults inflicted by adults who dislike each other are, between and sometimes on the lines, accusations of incompetence. Adults often view learning as a tool leading to greater competence, whether that be the ability to translate documents, obtain reliable information through a foreign language, open a bank account in

another country or earn a degree and get a job. Children, on the other hand, tend to be more future-oriented. We can tell children that they will first learn addition, then subtraction, then multiplication, and when they grow up, they will be able to balance their checkbook. They may or may not be impressed.

Keeping Knowles' four dimensions of the adult learner in mind, there are many ways in which we could account for our students' adult needs. We could consider giving three different options for homework assignments in order to provide our students with choices. We could put a "smorgasbord" of activities on the blackboard at the beginning of the class so that students don't have to do what happens to be dictated by the page and paragraph in the book, but, rather, by what interests them. These options could each cater to either extroverts or introverts, feeling-based or thinking-based learners, the analytical learner or the intuitive global student, etc. One interactive, one reflective, one imaginative and one analytical activity will usually be sufficient.[1] At the end of the hour all students share their work with each other and all of them reach the same learning objectives but by paths which they have chosen individually. This may require as little adaptation as dividing a chapter in the textbook into various sections and allowing students to start a different ends depending on their personal preferences rather than having everybody do everything in the same sequence. There is no reason not to question the assumption that all learners learn by doing the same activity at the same time.

While developing activities, it is important to remember the brilliantly to-the-point principles of course development suggested by Dr. Earl Stevick:

1. *Relevance*: close and specific relationship to anticipated needs.
2. *Function*: frequent and clear attention to function as well as to form.
3. *Communication*: consistent effort to make practice activities communicative.
4. *Comprehension*: exploitation of the "comprehension advantage."
5. *Imagery*: systematic development of mental imagery to match the verbal content of the lessons.

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[1] Oxford, R., Ehrman, M.E. & Lavine, R. Y. (1991). Style wars: Teacher-student style conflicts in the language classroom. In S.S. Magnan (Ed.), *Challenges in the 1990s for college foreign language programs*. Boston: Heinle.

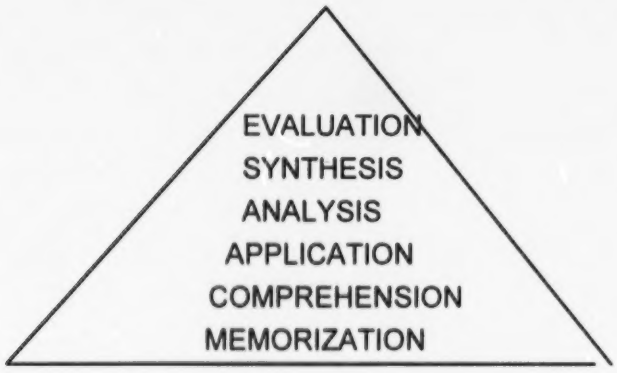
Functional language is the language which helps us accomplish something in the target language. It is also the type of language needed by foreigners whose language sophistication is considerably less than the native speakers with whom they are communicating. Students need functional language in order to reach their personal goals. By creating an information gap, instructors assure that students will use their language skills to get and exchange information in the target language. This is easily done. Give half the students one article and the other half a different article dealing with the same subject but with slightly different information. The task is for the students to work in pairs and write down 1) what information is contained in both articles, 2) what information is in the partner's article but not in the article which the student read, and 3) what information is in the original article but not in the partner's text. If instructors have only one article available for classroom use, they can read through the article before class, put it aside and record some but not all the information in their own words on tape. Some additional information should be included in the recording. Students can be given the same task of comparing the text with the tape. In this case, students could work either in pairs or alone. It is also quite easy to adapt textbook activities which fail to meet Dr. Stevick's criteria. Instead of having students turn to their neighbors and ask them what they ate for breakfast, a rather irrelevant question unless it is 9 a.m. and you have an extra donut in your pocket, ask students to come to a consensus with the class as a whole as to what constitutes the most "desirable" breakfast for the average person in the class. In order to avoid chaos, instructors might provide steps and procedures as follows:

1. Speak to at least four members of the class and find out what they usually eat for breakfast.
2. Write down what you mean by "desirable" and then discuss how the class is going to interpret that word (example: healthy? enjoyable? filling?) in its final report.
3. Decide in the class as a whole how you will define "the average person" , e.g., age? weight? etc.
4. Gather statistics in order to determine how you will describe "the average person".
5. Write out a breakfast menu which fits the definition of "desirable".
6. Share your menu ideas with other students.

7. Choose a discussion leader(s) and discuss all the issues.
8. Report back to your instructor. (This could also be a written assignment.)

In the classroom mental associations should run in streams. A word list may only trigger a trickle; a sentence may form a puddle of associations; a paragraph should form a small stream if students have to do something with it, e.g. read a description of a tourist area and then create an advertisement for a tourist brochure. However, if students are given multiple tasks with the material involving them in all four skills, reading, listening, speaking and writing, the trickle will work its way into a stream of associations and the likelihood that language will be learned will increase. The more complex the learning experience, the higher the retention will be. Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive skills may provide some guidance, showing us the level of mental involvement our tasks require of students. At the level of *memorization* students only recall, state, recite, and identify. This is also only a trickle. At the level of *comprehension* they explain, restate, and translate, again only a trickle. With *application* they carry out instructions, solve problems, and use the foreign language to manipulate information. Now we are approaching the puddle. With *analysis*, they take things apart in increasingly creative ways, and contrast and subdivide ideas. Students create their own categories for analysis basing the procedures they use on their cumulative experiences in living and thinking. In this case the stream is quickly becoming a river a associations. With *synthesis*, students design and develop formats, plan presentations, give briefings and develop summaries of information from different sources. With *evaluation*, they assess and judge using their own value systems, opinions and individual points of view.

Typically, many textbook exercises involve students in either *memorization* or *comprehension*, the two rather unproductive categories at the bottom of Bloom's pyramid. A text out of a German textbook describes what has happened in East Germany since the reunification. Apparently 70% of the "new" citizens have criticized being inundated with Western products; now the East German products are celebrating a comeback, according to a government speaker, and more of them are finding their way into the mainstream. The text has the keywords translated into English and is



Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Styles

followed by questions, such as, "What happened after the reunification?", "Why are the new citizens unhappy?", "Which products are making a comeback?." The student locates the passage in the text, puts the answer into short-term memory and writes and says the answer. Mentally students are neither involved in East Germany and its problems, nor are they using their background to work with the new information. This is a typical trickle exercise at the level of *comprehension* and *memorization*. Suggestions for adding some of the dimensions discussed so far might include tasks such as the following:

Change the Format
Read the article and develop a magazine advertisement to promote products from the new German states in the western part of the country. Before beginning, interview your instructor, who will play the role of a typical western German. Find out what her/his attitude is toward products from the East. Take notes. When creating your advertisement, you must pay particular attention to the attitude of potential buyers in the western states.

Contract the Information
Read the text and summarize the most essential information in three or four sentences in writing. Work alone and then compare your own summary with that of two other students. Rewrite your summaries into one final product and then present it to the class as a whole. Speak German.

Expand the Information
Read the article from the textbook and the three more recently published articles on East-West relations from the German wire service. Modify any information from the textbook which is no longer current or is misleading. On the previous page you will find a dialogue between a German from the East and a German from the West. Work with a partner and modify that dialogue to make it reflect the current situation and present your dialogue to the class as a whole.

Divide
Read the article. There are four paragraphs. Create a subtitle for each paragraph. The subtitle should serve to set the reader's expectations and highlight the essential information in the paragraph.

The following seven tasks use various media which require little preparation and integrate several skills:

Anticipate and Confirm
Skills used: listening-writing-speaking
Materials needed: newspaper article

The task involves students in listening to the headline of an article, anticipating what the article is about, and comparing their predictions with the actual content of the article. For example, a French article with the headline: "AFRIQUE DU SUD: RECONSTRUIRE L'ECOLE" ("South Africa: Rebuilding the Schools") is presented. After hearing the headline, students typically mention associations such as open access, equal opportunity, history of discrimination, buildings, facilities, curriculum, results of unequal access, juvenile delinquency. The article, in fact, mentions a variety of these issues.

An article of this type can be used in French at a very early level, as the task is to verify expectations only and the text has numerous cognates. It involves an activity adults engage in every day in their native language as they browse through the paper, pause when they see an interesting headline,

skim the text to confirm what they thought it was about, then go on to another article.

Dictogloss[2]
Skills used: listening-writing
Materials: cassette recording/transcript

The task involves students in listening to a recorded text (or the instructor reading it), writing down all the words and phrases they recognize, discussing what they wrote with other students, and then attempting to transcribe the text in one or two hearings. When finished, they compare their notes with a transcript of the original text. In the process, they correct any mistakes or gaps. The partially completed transcript the students end up with creates a natural information gap, i.e. a reason to communicate with other students.

Listening for What You Know
Skills used: listening-writing
Materials: recording of the news

The task involves students in identifying the main theme of news items (either on video or audiotape, authentic or adapted) and some of the vocabulary associated with each theme. To help guide students, the worksheet lists various news categories and asks them to write down words associated with each category. Several news items can be used. The sample item below is on a crime committed in Madrid by someone associated with the Cali drug cartel:

> La policía investiga la relación del triple crimen de Alcalá de Henares (Madrid) con el narcotráfico colombiano, posiblemente el poderoso cartel del Cali. El brutal asesinato, según esta primera hipótesis, sería consecuencia de un ajuste de cuentas motivado por el intento de las víctimas de pagar con dimero falso una entrega de cocaína.

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[2] Nunan, D. (1991). *Language Teaching Methodology.* New York: Prentice Hall.

CATEGORIES	PHRASES
political	
overseas	
disaster/accidents	
sports	
art/culture	
crime	
economics	
health	
education	
defense/military	
judicial	
religion	

Some instructors might be hesitatant to present so much information in the beginning of a course, particularly when it has not been "covered". They may feel tempted to read the text more slowly or make a copy of the article for students to read. Yet this may prompt the students, particularly the concrete-sequential learners, to want to translate it word for word. However, the task itself is so limited that even people who have never taken a class in Spanish could do quite well. In this playful manner, students who are more analytical than global can rehearse increasing their tolerance for ambiguity.

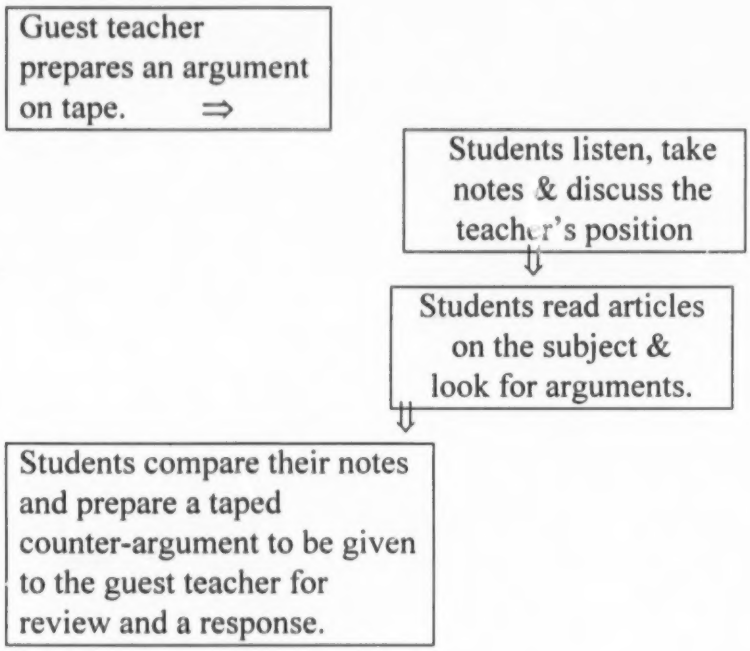
Comparing Information
Skills: reading-listening-writing-speaking
Materials: written text and a tape

The tape is created spontaneously by two teachers. They read through the written text quickly and then record their comments in the form of a spontaneous dialogue in approximately three minutes. The timing is important because the taped portion should be as authentic as possible.

Students read the article and then listen to the tape. Their task is to compare the information they hear with the information they read, as described earlier in this article.

Managed Debate
Skills: listening, speaking, writing, reading

The procedure is explained in the diagram.


Guest teacher prepares an argument on tape. ⇒
Students listen, take notes & discuss the teacher's position
Students read articles on the subject & look for arguments.
Students compare their notes and prepare a taped counter-argument to be given to the guest teacher for review and a response.

Tapes can be sent back and forth several times until the class tires of the activity. The choice of the theme for the debate should arise out of student interest and be controversial, e.g., France's nuclear tests. Articles can be found showing the French people's opinion, 63% of the population oppose the tests, 78% think that they are not necessary nowadays, and 64% would have preferred a referendum. As students formulate their rebutals, they should be given functional language, in this case essential gambits and phrases for expressing opinion, such as: "from my point of view," "I have to admit", "personally, I am against", "frankly, I think this is...," etc.
Students should inform themselves about the issue. There is nothing worse than a discussion in which no one knows anything about the theme.
In "Managed Debate", communication may even extend to a parallel class.

Newspaper Bullets
Skills used: reading-writing-speaking
Materials needed: newspaper articles

Students read separate newspaper articles on one topic and prepare short written and oral summaries. An example might be articles published in Spain on the Women's Conference in Peking in 1995 authored by people ranging from the archbishop of Madrid to independent feminist observers. As the event was fraught with incidents involving lock-outs and tightened security measures, narration in the past is a major function that could be practiced in this context. Various groups of students could receive a different article or part of an article, and prepare summaries, which all students would then integrate into a single summary that captures the essential content of all the information available.

Adaptation of a Narrative Text
Skills used: reading-writing
Materials needed: a narrative text (from the textbook, self-created, or authentic)

Students read a text, then read a chart with comparable but different information and finally rewrite the original text using the information contained in the chart. By way of illustration, we need only look at any given textbook with a picture of a student from the target culture being featured with family and educational background. They are usually photos from a publisher's archives with captions written by the textbook author. There would be no reason for students to care about this type of information. Yet juxtaposed to this could be incomparably more interesting information on you, the teacher, or someone the students know, listing anything from favorite things to do, eat, or visit, etc. The next step after writing a narrative similar to the one in the textbook could be for the students to write a narrative on themselves or a family member, thus personalizing it. If you have a portfolio system, your students could add photos, quotes, and postcards of places visited, making the activity personally relevant.

While the preceding tasks involve relatively little preparation and are easily inserted into the textbook you are using, there may be times when you feel so dissatisfied with the disjointed nature of your textbook that you will want to create a modality that will enable your students to recombine what they have learned in new, personally challenging ways. For example, after doing shopping and clothing as well as food and restaurant, one teacher realized how she was perpetrating the French cliche of "cuisine" and "haute couture". So she switched the focus to the homeless in France. With an article on the homeless in Marseille, she set the stage for a series of activities involving students in planning a menu for two daily meals at a homeless shelter and a clothing allotment for political asylum seekers. As students reviewed partitive and possessive articles, the menu and the clothing items, they were also negotiating what represented nutritious meals and survival wear on a low budget. Students argued quite congently that women did need high-heeled shoes for job interviews, for example.The check list on the next page was devised for teachers who have developed creative lesson plans and would like to evaluate their own performance.

LESSON EFFECTIVENESS CHECKLIST

The second language was used: ☐ most of the time ☐ part of the time ☐ not enough
☐ to communicate personal meaning
☐ to practice sentences from the textbook

Activities focused on ☐ form ☐ content ☐ both

Students used the following macro - skills ☐ reading ☐ speaking ☐ listening ☐ writing

Students worked ☐ in small groups ☐ individually ☐ as a whole class

They performed tasks involving the following cognitive skills: ↓ Examples of activities for each skill: ↓

☐ evaluation _____
☐ synthesis _____
☐ analysis _____
☐ application _____
☐ comprehension _____
☐ memorization _____

Grammar, syntax, morphology were addressed ☐ in isolation ☐ in a context

Materials used were ☐ authentic ☐ mostly authentic ☐ not authentic

Topics covered incorporated students' interests ☐ mostly ☐ partially ☐ not at all

Activities were geared towards individual learning styles ☐ for the most part ☐ somewhat ☐ not at all

The lesson plan incorporated recycling of themes ☐ yes ☐ a little bit ☐ not at all

****

What aspects of the lesson do I need to work on? _____

What am I going to change next time? _____

Other comments: _____